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ABSTRACT

Poor students and parents in the East Harlem schools of New York City's Community District 4 should have the same opportunity to obtain the benefits of school choice available to the wealthy, who can afford private and parochial schools. Parental choice can provide the catalyst for educational reform by introducing a market mechanism to the public educational system, creating a marketplace for new ideas, innovations, and investment. A choice plan also increases the sense of ownership of parents, students, teachers, and administrators. The following components have been incorporated into the development of 23 successful alternative schools in East Harlem: (1) public education has a responsibility to provide diverse educational opportunities; (2) each school needs an individual mission; (3) teaching and learning are inextricably intertwined; (4) students, parents, and personnel respond positively to respect and high expectations; (5) smaller schools encourage strong student-teacher relationships and decrease alienation; and (6) extending ownership of the school to students, parents, and professional staff enhances achievement and performance. Any school can maximize the potential of staff and students by encouraging staff to develop innovative programs based on their interests, talents, or philosophical beliefs, but slow, organic growth is the key to developing a successful choice system. The development of the Better Education Through Alternatives (BETA) School, the Jose Feliciano School for the Performing Arts, Central Park East, and the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics are examples of the effectiveness of alternative educational offerings. Statistical data are included on two tables. A list of 11 references is appended. (FMW)

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PARENTAL CHOICE IN EAST HARLEM SCHOOLS

Sy Fliegel

The debate over federal school vouchers has died down, but the search for alternative mechanisms that promote successful schools continues. I have always felt that youngsters in private and parochial schools are in a choice system and that it would be beneficial, if students and parents in public schools, could have an opportunity to select a quality school that meets their interests and abilities. In District 4, we hold the general belief that what is good for the children of the rich is good for the children of East Harlem.

The elements of successful schools have been decoded. The emphasis now has to be on the structure or system that promotes change.

Parental choice can provide the catalyst for educational reform by introducing a market mechanism to the public educational system-a market place for ideas, innovations and investment. It also increases the sense of ownership for parents, students, teachers and administrators. While choice, in itself, is not a panacea, it provides a framework for school improvement efforts.

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When I was Principal of P.S. 146 in Manhattan's East Harlem School District, I found one, year-end ritual particularly disheartening: each June, a number of parents of graduating sixth-graders would find my office to express trepidation about the zoned junior high school to which the students would now be assigned. These were invariably the best informed parents, whose information about the local junior high schools provoked some well-founded concern. And yet the best suggestion I could make, the best the system could offer was, "Why don't you use someone else's address?"

Educators in other school districts have certainly echoed that strategy, but the situation in East Harlem at the time was especially egregious: in 1973, the schools ranked 32nd out of 32 Districts in reading and mathematics. We had all the problems endemic to inner-city, low-income districts. Less than 16% of the students in the district were reading at or above grade level (New York City Board of Education, Pupil Achievement Report).

District 4 is located in New York City's East Harlem, sometimes called Spanish Harlem or "El Barrio." Approximately 65% of the population is Hispanic, 34% Black and 1% non-minorities. Its geographical boundaries extend from 96th Street to 125th Street, and from Fifth Avenue to the East River. The poverty and minority group isolation of the community is in visible contrast to the affluence of the communities to the south.

East Harlem has the eighth highest rate of welfare recipients in the twenty-six poverty areas of New York City. Thirty-one percent of the population is receiving assistance from the Department of Social Services. This number is double that of New York County and the City as a whole and is nearly three times the New York State median. Twenty-seven percent of the households in the community are headed by single parents. This compares with nearly nine percent in New York County and a New York State median of seven percent. Nearly one-third of the population of East Harlem is adolescent, twice the percentage for New York County.

And yet the severity of the educational and economic problems proved something of a spur to educational reform in District 4. Meaningful change can take place, in the education of youngsters, under what appears to be the most difficult of situations. I believe in the judo principle, using the force of your opponent or opposition to make headway, turning a negative force into a positive one. A failing system allows for innovation and risk taking that a mildly successful system might not allow. The District 4 leadership chose to take risks and to be innovative in part because it had nowhere to go but upwards.

In District 4 we had the opportunity to implement changes and we began slowly. We did not have a long-range plan that has brought us to where we are today. If I have to characterize the process, it would have to be based on an organic development that grew out of the needs, the aspirations, the energies and

the vision of a number of dedicated educators, parents and community leaders.

In 1974, we started three small alternative concept schools. One, of those schools, was the B.E.T.A. School, Better Education Through Alternatives. B.E.T.A. is the kind of alternative school that is always supported by everyone, even those people who do not support alternative education. Basically it says, give us your troubled youngsters and we will take them off your hands. I often thought you could get support for that kind of school if you didn't have a real school but a facade of a school building at the edge of a cliff. Principals in other schools would be happy to send their youngsters who are acting out, who take too much of their time, who are not succeeding in their schools to that type of alternative school.

The B.E.T.A. School was a success from the first day it opened. We were able to provide these "acting out" youngsters with a learning environment that accepted them as individuals who had difficulties adjusting to the regular school program. Three years after opening, it was cited a model program. It is worth noting that at one time we had 240 students in the B.E.T.A. School. Today, we have fewer than 60 acting out youngsters.

Whenever possible, I prefer to have more objective commentators write about our schools. To me, self praise is almost as good as no praise.

In the December 1976 edition of Encore Magazine, the Black Biweekly news magazine, reporter Essie Baker had the following to say about the B.E.T.A. School:

> "The children are not only enjoying school; they seem to be learning better, too."
>
> This is especially evident at the district B.E.T.A. School where the emphasis is on underachieving students in grades 5-9 who have experienced difficulties in adjusting to a regular school.
>
> "John Falco, the school's director, insures that B.E.T.A.'s students get both a sound curriculum and a steady guiding hand. Falco works to provide the students with a sense of self-worth, self-control, and self-discipline, for once a child gains this positive self-image, Falco believes, everything else follows more easily.
>
> Everything in the B.E.T.A. School is done to get positive results....
>
> In addition to the basic curriculum, the B.E.T.A. School offers a tutorial program. A reward system is an active part of the school's approach....
>
> Not every rule adhered to in a regular school is followed, but the results may be better-at least the children think so. All who were asked felt it was the best school they ever attended."[1]

At the same time as the B.E.T.A. School was started, we opened the East Harlem Performing Arts School and Central Park East. In Quality Education in the Inner City: The Story of the Central Park East Schools, David Bensman, a professor of history at Rutgers University, New Jersey, describes the early days of the latter school:

> "In the summer of 1974, staff members of what would soon be Central Park East School (CPE) began posting flyers in East Harlem Day Care and Head Start centers to announce the

opening of their new elementary school that fall. Their school-to-be had no consituency, no student body, no base of support in the poor, largely Hispanic community where it would be located. Its physical facilities - two floors of a seventy-five year old, run-down elementary school on 103rd Street between Fifth Avenue and Madison--could hardly have been less hospitable to the open classrooms the staff aimed to create.

The school building was already occupied by a school whose principal and staff naturally distrusted the newcomers who would compete for pupils, resources, and playground space.

CPE's way was not smoothed by foundation grants; the school had to make do with the resources available to all the schools in its District. And the school's irregular status was a burden. Its leader lacked a principal's title, prerogatives, and power. Nor was the school exempt from the numerous rules and procedures of the Central Board of Education and United Federation of Teachers.

Most of the educational reformers then active in the District were busy developing a bilingual program; they regarded CPE's efforts with attitudes ranging from indifference to outright hostility. Local educational conservatives, on the other hand, were equally mistrustful of what they saw as the school's "permissiveness" and lack of discipline.

What this meant was that every decision the CPE staff made could be challenged; each of its failures could be held up as proof that the venture was misguided, or botched, or perhaps both.

By 1984, as the school celebrated its tenth anniversary, CPE was widely hailed as a success. Well-known educators from across America extolled its innovative practices and its startling successes. At the local level, the school's reputation ensured it had more applicants than it could accommodate, while parents from distant neighborhoods desperately sought admittance for their children."[2]

The third of our original alternative schools, The East Harlem Performing Arts School, is now the Jose Feliciano School for the Performing Arts and has been adopted by the performer. It is one of our largest alternative schools and is recognized as one of the outstanding performing arts schools in New York City. Students are accepted based on their interest and not their proficiency in the arts.

By 1976, there were six alternative schools and I was appointed the first director. My job, as I understood it, was to nourish, support and protect the existing alternative schools, and to develop new schools which would offer students in District 4 real alternatives to the local junior high schools their geographic location would otherwise fix for them. Having broken the mind set of one school per geographic location, we were free to design schools as we felt they should be designed, reflecting our own biases and imaginations.

With the support of the Superintendent, I began working with the Directors to create a cohesive network of alternative schools.

What makes a good school? Some of my own biases follow:

Bias #1. I believe strongly in public education; when I speak about choice, it is in regard to public schools. People attending private schools already are part of a choice system. Choice is only meaningful when quality and diversity are involved. Public education cannot take its constituency for

granted. Our responsibility is to provide a variety of quality educational opportunities for children.

Bias #2. In order to get somewhere, you have to know where you want to go. In Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures In Wonderland, Alice is wandering through the forest lost, when she comes upon the wise owl she asks, "Which way should I go?"[3] He replies, "where do you want to get to?" She states, "I don't know." "Then it doesn't matter which way you go." He wisely suggests. My bias: without a dream, vision or mission for a school, the school will go nowhere. A school is an idea, a vision, not a building.

Bias #3. Teaching and learning are so intertwined that it is almost impossible to separate the two. Many years ago, Neil Postman talked about teaching and learning. He cited the following statement: "I taught that, but the children didn't learn it." and asked, "please define taught as it is used in that sentence."[4]

I don't think teaching takes place until learning occurs. For example, I would never say that I taught my wife to drive but she can't drive. I may have attempted to teach her, but if she can't drive, I didn't succeed in my teaching.

In our schools, teaching would be understood as inextricably linked to the learning that accompanied it.

Bias #4. It is how you treat people that determines how they behave. George Bernard Shaw illustrates the idea elegantly in Pygmalion when the question is asked about the difference

between a lady and a flower girl. It is not how she behaves but how she is treated that signifies the difference.

When children, parents and professionals are treated with respect and high expectations they will respond accordingly. On the other hand, when youngsters are treated without respect and with low expectations, you can be sure that they will not disappoint you.

Bias #5. Smaller schools are better for children. Youngsters don't get lost easily in small schools. Teachers and students get to know each other in a personal way; students don't feel alienated.

Bias #6. Extending ownership of the schools to students, parents and professional staff enhances achievement and performance. People treat what they own better than what they don't own.

By encouraging professional staff members to develop innovative programs based on interests, talents or philosophical beliefs and by giving them the opportunity to realize their dreams and participate in the decision-making process, a district can succeed in maximizing the potential of both staff and students. Ownership is established when students and parents are given a choice in selecting a school that is geared to their interests and abilities. Interestingly enough,despite the diversity of personalities and philosophies of the teachers who presented ideas and plans for new programs, their reactions

when given the final okay was always the same. They were shocked or surprised and usually asked, " do you really mean it?" Their expectation of the system was that even when people expressed admiration and support for the new program, the establishment would always find a reason for not being able to do it at this time.

We have 23 alternative schools today, but we built them one by one, expanding earlier schools or adding additional ones when teachers in the district were willing to work together to develop a more exciting place to teach.

Following is a chronology of alternative concept schools development. Some schools involved a year's pre-planning; others were developed during a six month period.

Each prospective Director was carefully screened and had demonstrated success in a previous position.

Opened	Name of School
September, 1974	Central Park East I
September, 1974	The East Harlem Performing Arts School
September, 1974	The B.E.T.A. School
September,1975	The East Harlem Middle School (Northview)
September, 1975	The Harbor School
September, 1975	The Children's Learning Center
September, 1976	The East Harlem Block School
September, 1976	The East Harlem Career Academy
September, 1976	The East Harlem School of Communications and Health Services
September, 1978	The Bridge School
September, 1978	The Sports School

September, 1979	The Maritime School
September, 1979	The Office of Alternative Schools expands to include three curriculum specialists
September, 1980	Central Park East II
September, 1980	The Academy of Environmental Sciences (joint project Districts 2 & 4)
September, 1981	The Children's Workshop
September, 1981	The Isaac Newton School for Science and Mathematics
September, 1981	Manhattan East Center for Arts and Academics
September, 1982	Project Mainstream
September, 1982	The School of Science and Humanities
September, 1982	River East
September, 1982	The Key School
September, 1982	The Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics (Joint project with Division of High Schools)
September, 1983	College for Human Services Junior High School
September, 1985	Central Park East Secondary School

Central Park East was so successful that C.P.E. II was c and River East became the third elementary school followir philosophy and practices of CPE I. Katherine Davis Fi described the growth of the Central Park East School in New Magazine's January, 1986 article, "The Middle-Class Par Guide to the Public Schools":

> Three magnet schools, each with two or three grades and about 90 students were launched in District 4 in the mid-seventies. Each was given a few classrooms in a larger school, and the teachers who ran them agreed to take on directors' responsibilities with no salary increase...
>
> One of District 4's original magnet schools, Central Park East, at 19 East 103rd Street, has earned considerable recognition. As an elementary school, it received such a strong park-bench press, that it had to reproduce

> itself twice in order to meet the demand without losing intimacy. Now, in addition to CPE I, CPE II, and River East, the school, which is part of a countrywide network being developed by Theodore Sizer of Brown University to carry out his educational theories. 5

Two years ago, we opened the Central Park East Secondary School starting with grade seven. Eventually the school will include grades 7-12. The school is guided by the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national organization of public and private high schools directed by Brown University Education Dean Theodore Sizer. Briefly, stated these principles include the idea that less is more; it is better to know some things well than to know many things superficially. High standards are set for all students with students being able to demonstrate mastery. Teaching and learning are personalized with students perceived as workers and teachers functioning as coaches. Thus, students discover answers and solutions and learn by doing.

C.P.E.S.S. offers a common core curriculum for all students in grades 7-10, organized around two major fields: Mathematics/Science for half the school day, and Humanities (art, history, social studies, literature) for the other half. Every effort is made to integrate academic disciplines, so that students recognize and understand the interrelationships between different subjects of study. The communication skills of writing and public speaking are taught in all subjects by all staff.

> Katherine Davis-Fishman continues, "The schools I saw-two with a half-middle-class, out-of- district clientele and one serving mostly neighborhood students-were surely appealing. Manhattan East, at 215 East 99th Street, gives 210 students in the seventh and eighth grades a rigorous traditional liberal-arts program. The average reading and math scores fall between three and four-and-a-half years above grade level. Of 88 students in the 1985 graduating class, 9 got into Stuyvesant, 18 into Bronx Science, and 42 into LaGuardia High School of Music and the Arts, among other places. Manhattan East is a serious place: Students get summer assignments in several subjects; a curriculum is sent home to parents; the reading list is hearteningly filled with classics.
>
> Applicants from outside the district (last year 350 students applied for 90 spots, half of which were reserved for District 4 children) must spend a day visiting the school, at which time they take an arithmetic test and are interviewed, I spent a day at Manhattan East, didn't see a bad class, and found five teachers I'd rate exceptional."

By 1982 we had enough of a reputation for the alternative schools, and enough schools, to invite all of the students in the district to select a junior high school from a list of offerings whose diversity and quality amounted to a real choice. A New York Times Editorial announced our move to a district-wide system of parental choice on March 25, 1982: (New York Times, 1982)

"Schools that Dare to Compete"

> New York's District #4 has done it again. For nearly a decade, the East Harlem Community district has been a fount of innovation offering "alternative" junior high schools hat give students unusual choices. Now it will take the further step of allowing seventh-graders to attend whatever district school they like.

The New York Times

Founded in 1851

ADOLPH S. OCHS, Publisher 1896-1935
ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER, Publisher 1935-1961
ORVIL E. DRYFOOS, Publisher 1961-1963

ARTHUR OCHS SULZBERGER, Publisher

A. M. ROSENTHAL, Executive Editor
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Schools That Dare to Compete

New York's School District No. 4 has done it again. For nearly a decade, the East Harlem community district has been a fount of innovation, offering "alternative" junior high schools that give students unusual choices. Now it will take the further step of allowing seventh-graders to attend whatever district school they like.

The idea of enlarging choice has already proved its worth. Eliminating school zones altogether extends the benefit to all students.

Half the district's 3,000 junior high students have chosen one of 19 "alternative" schools. Originally meant for troublesome children, some of these schools still specialize in teaching those who perform below their capacities. But they now also include the Academy of Environmental Sciences and the Isaac Newton School for Mathematics and Sciences. The wider the choice, it turned out, the larger the number of students who wanted choice.

The specter of school competition frightens some educators. They think it will lead to the closing of less popular schools and to reassignments of staff. A school's reputation, even the entire district's, could suffer if the expectations of student-consumers are disappointed. Some wonder whether pre-adolescents can make intelligent choices.

But the expected benefits of this experiment are most promising. Free choice will require students and their families to consider what they most want in a school. That half the students currently opt for "alternatives" shows they have strong views in the matter. Moreover, the competition for students should invigorate tired teachers and programs.

The success of the "alternative" schools is plain, and District 4 has every right to press on with its experiment. Seven years ago it ranked last among the city's 32 districts in reading scores; now it is 18th. The number of graduates admitted to selective high schools has soared from 27 to more than 200. Most heartening, several hundred white students who live outside the predominantly black and Hispanic district now voluntarily attend its schools.

Where better to test the concept of healthy competition — the idea that drives the more flawed proposals for giving families a dollar voucher for schooling of their choice? Teachers, taxpayers and, above all, children stand to gain a great deal if East Harlem's daring experiment is validated.

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> voucher for schooling of their choices? Teachers, taxpayers and, above all, children stand to gain a great deal if East Harlem's daring experiment is validated."[6]

The results of the change, and similar educational policies in the district, were dramatic: now, over 64% of our students read at or above grade level, and by 1981 and since 1981, the district has ranked 16th to 18th of 32 districts citywide in reading, and 21st in mathematics.

Community School District #4, Manhattan

Percentage of Students Reading at or Above Grade Level as Compiled from Pupil Achievement Report, New York City Board of Education.

Year	Percentage of Students at or Above Grade Level
1973	15.9
1974	15.3
1975	28.3
1976	27.9
1977	29.7
1978	25.9
1979	25.7
1980	35.6
1981	44.3
1982	48.5
1983	52.3
1984	48.1
1985	53.1
1986	62.2
1987	62.6
1988	64.8

The city-wide testing instrument for the years 1982-1985 was the California Achievement Test in Reading. The population reflected in the figures includes Grades 2 through 9.

Beginning in Spring 1986, the city-wide testing instrument was changed to the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP). Those grades tested with the DRP are Grades 3 through 9.

Percentage of Students Performing at or Above Grade Level in Mathematics

Year	Percentage of Students at or Above Grade Level
1982	41.8
1983	49.0
1984	50.6
1985	51.0

The city-wide testing instrument used in the years 1982-1985 was the Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Tests (SDMT). The tested population was Grades 2 through 9.

Today, District 4 serves approximately 14,000 students enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten to grade nine. The District is noted for its range of quality educational program choices. Twenty-one school sites house 16 regular elementary school programs, 9 bilingual schools, 23 alternative schools and 2 high schools. Each alternative school program has a thematic core, from science to sports, around which curriculum is structured. These quality educational option programs have attracted students from all over the city. The bilingual schools incorporate programs that support the retention of Spanish language and culture while promoting English language skills and content area learning. As a result of these educational option programs, District 4 has experienced consistent improvement in student academic achievement in reading and mathematics, and in student placement in academically enriched high school programs in New York City.

A measure which directly reflects junior high school achievement is the rate of admission into New York City's specialized high schools, The Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant High School, Brooklyn, Tech, La Guardia High School (the old Music and Art and Performing Arts High School), all of which require an entrance examination. The test is basically one of Reading and Mathematics ability. While in 1973, only 10 youngsters from our District were accepted into the specialized and private high schools, last year over 250 youngsters were accepted into these high schools.

We encountered resistance, of course, but most if it has been overcome by the improvements in mathematics and reading scores and by the enthusiastic support of students and parents in our district. We did not allow anxiety over unforeseen consequences of the change, or the attitude of educational authorities, to dictate the form and adequacy of the schooling we provided.

There are many cop-outs for not doing anything. When I was a young teacher, I taught for nine years in Central Harlem's P.S. 129, an elementary school that was a demonstration school for the City College of New York. I would often go beyond the prescribed curriculum and methodology with my 6th grade class. Older teachers would say, "you can't do that, the Central Board of Education wouldn't let you." I would ask my colleagues if they could name the members of the Central Board of Education--I

knew that they had never met any of its members. Now, I would ask, why should someone you can't name and have never seen prevent you from doing something you believe to be educationally beneficial for your students?

Over the years, I have heard similar admonitions many times; in recent years it has been, "the Union won't allow you to do that." Our district is in New York City and we have the strongest union local in the country. We have made many innovative changes and the Union has never been an obstacle or blocker. Often our opposition turns out to be ourselves.

Today, we have twenty-three alternative concept schools and two high schools. At some time or other each of these schools has been cited as an exemplary school. The District has received recognition from many diverse segments of the educational and larger world. In May, 1987, President Reagan invited Superintendent Carlos M. Medina and me to the White House Rose Garden for a ceremony honoring our successful efforts in educating disadvantaged children. On March 26, 1987, in a speech delivered in Columbia, Missouri, the President said, "Inner City schools in poor neighborhoods-like those in East Harlem's District 4...stand among America's best."(Reagan, 1987)[8]

On March 23, 1987, The MacNeil/Lehrer Show featured a story on educational choices in District 4 that is repeatedly shown throughout the country. The House Committee on Labor and Human Resources has amended the magnet school legislation to include monies for parental choice as a direct result of The MacNeil/Lehrer broadcast.

The Secretary of Education, William Bennett, often points to District 4 as an example of a district in a socio-economically poor community that is able to offer quality education for youngsters. The United States Department of Education has cited the District in the 1987 edition of What Works: Educating the Disadvantaged and presented District Four with a Certificate of Merit for outstanding progress toward excellence in compensatory education.

As a result of a conversation between Secretary Bennett and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, she had her Minister of Education, Kenneth Baker, visited the District. The English press highlighted his visit and the accomplishments of District #4, Manhattan.

The former Governor of Minnesota, Albert H. Quie, writing in Education Week had this to say about our District.

> When people ask me if choice systems can help poor inner-city students, I refer them to New York City's District 4, in Spanish Harlem. Because there is no "neighborhood" junior high school for students to attend, all sixth graders receive instruction on how to choose from the district's 17 junior high school programs-developed by teachers-specializing in areas such as maritime careers, performing arts, science and mathematics.
>
> Measures of the program's success are its ability to attract students from other, much more affluent areas and the dramatic increase in test scores of children in Spanish Harlem."(Quie, 1987)[9]

Mario D. Fantini, in his latest book, Regaining Excellence in Education has this to say:

> "Other school districts that have provided models of competition and choice have had a

> profound effect on the revitalization of the schools. Community School District 4, in New York City provides another good example of how the principles of competition and choice can work. For over a decade, a predominantly Hispanic population has been pioneering alternative education in New York."(Fantini, 1987) 10

At my first appearance before the Senate Sub-Committee on Education, Arts and Humanities in 1983, Dr. Harvey Scribner, a former Chancellor of the New York City School System and Commissioner of Education for the State of Vermont, entered the following for the Congressional Record:

> Dr. Scribner: "One of the gutsiest moves I have ever seen in public education in the 50 years that I have been in it is something that happened in District 4, where Mr. Fliegel comes from when the Superintendent announced to the public...that you are going to find your own junior high school next year but we will spend time to help you become educated as to what the choices are: If that can happen in East Harlem, rather in District 4, it could happen in America any place and we will have an opportunity to watch that to see how it is going to work out. But I thought that was a great move in public education and it ought to be on record so everybody else can know about it."(Scribner, 1983) 11

Some cautions and suggestions regarding free parental choice systems. As choice becomes popular, it becomes attractive as a way to solve larger educational problems. We are always looking for panaceas; we seldom find them.

Choice has to be approached carefully and slowly. We started with three alternative schools; we were concerned about developing quality schools that offered some diversity.

Our development was organic. We did not have a grand plan that envisioned forty-nine different schools in twenty buildings. When I hear about a school district deciding to become a complete choice system in one blow, I worry. It will do no one any good if all that a choice system allows is parents and students to select one inadequate school over another. Quality takes time to develop. It is much better to have, at first, a few schools that are oversubscribed because of the quality and diversity they offer than to have poor choices for everyone. Once those few are established and demonstrate that a quality educational environment can be provided for all students, it encourages the development of a network of choice schools that eventually opens choice to all schools.

Start in a small way, but make it successful. Determine what kinds of schools has an appeal to parents and students. It is easier to start an open education or progressive educational elementary school because there are always parents interested in that philosophical approach and who usually are dissatisfied with the existing traditional schools. On the junior high level performing arts schools or schools for science and mathematics are the most attractive.

Our experience has underscored the benefits of starting small, with only an opening grade. On the junior high level, start with two classes of seventh graders. Over the course of the next two years take in another two classes of 7th graders.

At the end of three years you will have six classes in 7th, 8th and 9th grade. Avoid the growth trap. For some reason, everyone likes to expand when they have a well organized productive school that is able to maintain a family atmosphere and allows staff and students to get to know and care for each other. If you must, add two more classes and stop.

The question of exceptional leaders is raised whenever the possibility of replication is discussed. I feel that every school district in this country has the potential leaders. In District 4, we created a climate that encouraged teachers to come forward with their dreams, visions or ideas on how to educate youngsters. Most of our successful schools were developed from a concept by Directors and/or Principals who had a vision and an opportunity to develop that vision; they were able to communicate that vision to teachers, students and parents who then took ownership of the dream.

Our requirement was that a new Director had to be successful at what he/she was presently doing and willing to put in extra time, energy and enthusiasm to make the dream a reality.

Once a Director was identified, it was my responsibility to provide support in terms of adequate space, funds and personnel. Any new school needs time, encouragement and protection for its philosophical base. Mistakes will be made whenever risk taking is involved. The district leadership must have confidence in the new school's leadership even when they do some foolish things. For example, if the alternative school is sharing space in an

existing school, at some point it will infringe upon or slight the principal of the building. It becomes the supervisor's role to somehow soothe the injured party. Nothing is as soothing as some additional funds or educational materials or equipment.

Inherent in the establishment of a new alternative school is autonomy to carry out its vision. All our schools must adhere to the following guidelines: the mission of the school is to improve instruction and learning. It is the responsibility of principals and directors to provide instructional leadership by ensuring an environmental climate that is conducive to intellectual, emotional and social development. Our schools have to be a good place for youngsters and adults to share experiences and engage themselves for their mutual growth and development.

Wherever possible, visible support and recognition should be given to the new school.

What I have discussed above are the steps in establishing any alternative school for choice. The same steps can be taken when selecting or changing an existing school into a school of choice. In many ways it is better and easier if an established principal and his staff opt for becoming a school of choice. It avoids a great deal of petty maneuvering for territory and power. Of course, the best way to support and develop a school is by having that school provide a quality education for its students. High test scores on standardized tests never seem to hurt.

Parental support built in at the school's inception goes a

long way in protecting the school. Critics say choice cannot in inner-city schools because parents lack the neces education to make informed choices. They are wrong. Inner- minority parents are no less concerned than their middle c counterparts to see their children educated in stimulat orderly, vigorous schools, and no less capable of choosing t schools when information is made available to them. Their of resources rarely presents them with a choice in education, their aspirations for their children are no more limited more affluent parents. Schooling often represents the avenue of escape from a much more desparate situation.

We provide parents with reading and math scores and school placements. Our parents and our kids know who the teachers are and which are the best schools. They selections based on experience, word of mouth and pu information about the schools. Remember, I believe strongl the concept of ownership. The more people you get to feel they own the school the better it is for everyone involved.

I stated earlier that one of my major biases was the be that meaningful change, in the education of youngsters, can place under what appears to be the most difficult circumstances. I would like to close with the story of Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics.

We had demonstrated that elementary and junior high sc students in an inner city district could achieve and comp

Unfortunately, the quality of high school programs offered in New York City is limited. We were graduating fine youngsters from junior high school and we had little to say about which high schools they would attend and even less to say about the educational program they would receive. In our community, the zoned high school was Benjamin Franklin High School. Many years ago, when it opened, it was a good high school. One of its most outstanding graduates is Senator Patrick Moynihan. Unfortunately from 1973 to 1982, it was a failing school.

I have cited the following statistics 1,000 times and I still can't fully comprehend their meaning.

Only 7% of Benjamin Franklin's entering freshman class graduated; that left 93% as dropouts. Attendance in the morning was 44%. District 4 sent only a handful of its students to Benjamin Franklin. The rest went to specialized, option or choice schools. The Central Board finally closed out the school in June, 1982.

The District, in partnership with the Central Board of Education, reopened it in September, 1982 as the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics. It is an educational complex that contains a separate elementary school, junior high school and senior high school. Each school within the Center provides an enriched curriculum in math and the sciences with computer literacy being a major subject. Our goal was to prepare youngsters for a technological society and get them to go to college.

We graduated our first class on Sunday, June 29, 1986. A front page story in Monday's New York Times, headlined-"East Harlem School In First Graduation Sees Dreams Thrive." The story, by Jane Perlez; went on to say "Coleman Genn had a dream: what Cornell University was for Ithaca, New York, his high school would become for East Harlem. If a center of learning could enhance a quiet upstate town, so, the principal reasoned, could a school of excellence help mend an area beset by drugs and dropouts. Yesterday, only four years later, what many considered the impossible dream had become a reality.

At the first graduation of the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, only one student dropped out and everyone else was headed for colleges, including Yale, Amherst, M.I.T and Hunter."(Perlez, 1986)

Actually, no one dropped out; the one dropout mentioned in the article ended up in a junior college.

It has been a long time since I was last disheartened by the inadequate response we would give to parents who were dissatisfied with their zoned junior high school. Today, parents in East Harlem do not have to present a phony address to enroll in a superior junior high school. They receive a simple application after an orientation process that includes classroom lessons in decision making, a decisions booklet that describes all the schools, parent meetings where school representatives and parents discuss each of the choices available and school visits by parents and prospective students. This process allows them to make the best choice for and with their child.

The District has received recognition from many sources outside of our community. The greatest satisfaction, however, comes from the pride and support we receive from our students, parents and staff members. The media and educational observers focus on reading and math scores. I have not described the spirit of our District and its excitement over the countless student performances, exhibits and daily experiences that make life for youngsters meaningful.

How do we measure the value of the trip to the Soviet Union that our championship chess team will make this spring? For the fifteen minority students from East Harlem, it could be the most significant experience of their lives.

Now, that's a pleasant thought to close on.

Endnotes

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[3] Lewis Carroll, "Alice's Adventures In Wonderland," 1865.

[4] Neil Postman, Course at New York University, Language and Human Behavior, February, 1970.

[5] Katherine Davis-Fishman, "Middle-Class Parents Guide to Public Education," New York Magazine, January, 1986.

[6] Editorial, New York Times, March 25, 1982.

[7] Nancy J. Risque, Cabinet Secretary, Telegram dated May 14, 1987.

[8] President Ronald Reagan, Remarks by the President to the National Governors Association/Department of Education Conference, Columbia, Missouri, March 26, 1987.

[9] Albert H. Quie, Education Week, May 20, 1987.

[10] Mario D. Fantini, Regaining Excellence in Education, Merrill Publishing Co., 1986.

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